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ABSTRACT

This study used the Parenting Puppet Interview, an age-appropriate measure of the child's perspective of the mother-child relationship, as well as maternal report of the relationship, to predict teacher reports of behavioral and emotional problems. Forty-three children, ages 4 through 6 years, and their mothers and teachers participated in this study. The Teacher Report Form and the Parent Report on Preschoolers questionnaire were also used. The study found that child and maternal reports of the mother-child relationship differentially predicted externalizing, internalizing, social, and behavioral problems. Maternal report of high hostility, but not child report, was strongly related to internalizing behavior. Maternal and child reports coordinated in associating low maternal responsiveness and demanding behavior with externalizing behavior. Low responsiveness and high hostility as reported by both mothers and children were associated with overall behavior problems. The Parenting Puppet Interview and puppet methodology were found to be successful for examining how the child's perspective affects healthy development and adjustment. (JPB)

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Child and Parental Report of the Parent-Child Relationship as Predictors of Behavior and Emotional Problems in Preschool Children

Abstract

Despite strong evidence that variations in the parent-child relationship predict emotional and behavioral problems in preschool children, the child's perspective on this relationship has not been studied. This study used a newly developed age-appropriate measure of the child's perspective of the mother-child relationship, as well as maternal report of the relationship, to predict teacher reports of behavioral and emotional problems. Forty-three children, ages 4-6, and their mothers and teachers participated in this study. Child and maternal reports of the mother-child relationship differentially predicted externalizing, internalizing, social problems, and behavioral problems.

Aims:

- To examine which specific dimensions of the parent-child relationship predict behavioral and emotional problems in preschool children.

- To examine how maternal versus child reports of the parent-child relationship differentially predict behavioral and emotional problems in preschool children.

Method

Sample:

Twenty-five male and eighteen female preschool children, ages 4-6, and their mothers and teachers participated in this study. The sample was primarily white middle-class children, all enrolled in a private preschool in a metropolitan area.

Measures:

- Teacher Report Form (TRF). Standardized questionnaire that measures internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Achenbach, 1986).

- Parent Report on Preschoolers (PROP). Questionnaire that assesses five dimensions of the mother-child relationship: structure, warmth and responsiveness, demandingness, positive affect, and hostility toward the child.

- Parenting Puppet Interview (PPI): Interactive interview that assesses five dimensions of the mother-child relationship: structure, warmth and responsiveness, demandingness, positive affect, and hostility toward the child. The methodology for the interview was adapted from the Berkeley Puppet Interview (Ablow & Measelle) and from Eder's self-concept puppet methodology.

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Parenting Puppet Interview Methodology:

During this interview, identical puppets say opposing statements about their family environment. For example, one puppet says, "My mommy lets me jump on the bed," and the other says, "My mommy does not let me jump on the bed." Children indicate which puppet is more like them.

Sample Items From the PROP and PPI, and Correlation Between Mother and Child Report:

Structure (r = -.09)
PROP
There is a fixed routine for my child at bed-time that seldom changes.
Puppet
I get to go to bed whenever I want.
I go to bed when my mommy tells me to go to bed.

Responsiveness (r = -.01)
PROP
I praise my child when he/she does something well.
Puppet
My mommy likes the things I make.
My mommy does not like the things I make.

Demandingness (r = .10)
PROP
How often do you expect your child to refrain from interrupting when you are on the phone?
Puppet
I do not have to be quiet when my mommy is on the telephone.
I have to be quiet when my mommy is on the telephone.

Positive Affect (r = -.28)
PROP
My child and I don't have much fun together.
Puppet
My mommy and I have fun together.
My mommy and I do not have fun together.

Hostility (r = -.04)
PROP
I yell at my child at least once a day.
Puppet
My mommy yells a lot.
My mommy yells a little.

Plan of Analysis

Separate nonparametric correlations were computed between each of the five parenting dimensions (for the PROP and PPI) and the TRF outcomes of internalizing externalizing, social problems, and overall behavior problems. Zun tests of correlational differences were computed to compare mother and child correlations of parenting dimensions and outcomes.

Results

(See tables in Appendix for actual correlations)

- **Internalizing:** Maternal report of high hostility, but not child report, was strongly related to internalizing behavior.

- **Externalizing:** Maternal report of low responsiveness and demandingness, and high report of hostility and structure was associated with externalizing behavior. Child report of low responsiveness, demandingness, and positive affect also was associated with externalizing behavior.

- **Social Problems:** Maternal report of low responsiveness and high hostility was associated with social problems. Child report of low physical affection was also associated with social problems.

- **Overall Behavior Problems:** Maternal report of low responsiveness and high hostility was strongly related to overall behavior problems. Child report of low demandingness, responsiveness, and positive affect was also related to overall behavior problems.

Discussion

Maternal and child reports of parenting dimensions differentially predicted emotional and behavioral problems. Researchers interested in the links between family experience and child psychopathology should assess the child's perspective on the family. The Parenting Puppet Interview and puppet methodology provide a successful means for examining how the child's perspective affects healthy development and adjustment.

Appendix

Internalizing

	Mother Report	Child Report	Test of Equal Correlations z score
Structure	-.06	-.07	.04
Responsiveness	-.03	.01	.18
Demandingness	.11	-.13	1.04
Positive Affect	.09	-.07	.70
Hostility	.30 *	-.07	1.65 *

Externalizing

	Mother Report	Child Report	Test of Equal Correlations z score
Structure	.15 +	-.01	.66
Responsiveness	-.27 *	-.17 +	.46
Demandingness	.17 +	-.21 *	1.67 *
Positive Affect	-.09	-.25 *	.72
Hostility	.27 *	-.02	1.29 +

Social Problems

	Mother Report	Child Report	Test of Equal Correlations z score
Structure	-.01	.07	.35
Responsiveness	-.26 *	-.07	.85
Demandingness	-.13	-.09	.62
Positive Affect	.01	-.22 *	1.02
Hostility	.31 *	-.03	1.53 +

Behavior Problems

	Mother Report	Child Report	Test of Equal Correlations z score
Structure	.08	-.06	.61
Responsiveness	-.34 **	-.19 +	.71
Demandingness	.11	-.35 **	2.06 *
Positive Affect	-.08	-.19 +	.49
Hostility	.38 **	.034	1.61 +

Correlations and z scores reported using a one-tailed test of significance. ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ + $p < .10$